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Ancestry of John Prescott, Condensed.

(From Boston Evening Transcript, August 14, 1905.)

Answer to Note 441. "Americans of Royal Descent." In the Transcript of July 17, 1905, C. H. B. A. speaks of the ancestry of John Prescott, founder of Lancaster, Mass. We have examined the work referred to, by "Rollo Ogden," but failed to find anything of importance except the statement which he apparently copies from a letter from W. H. Prescott, written in London, June 17, 1816, to his parents at home, after visiting the Herald's office. "To my uttermost consternation, they tell me there is no such crest as an owl in their books." We find in "Encyclopædia of Heraldry," by John Burke, Esq., and John Bernard Burke, Esq., London, 1851: "Standish, (Standish County, Lancaster; derived from Thurston de Standish, living 6 [year of the reign] Henry III., who inherited lands in Shevington, from his mother, Margaret de Standish, daughter and co-heiress of Robert de Hulton. The present representative of this ancient house is Charles Strickland Standish of Standish, Esq., eldest son by Anastasia, his wife, daughter and co-heiress of Sir John Lawson of Brough, Bart., of the late Thomas Strickland, Sizergh, County Westmoreland, Esq., who took the name and arms of Standish estate), sa. three standing dishes ar. crest An Owl, with a rat in its talons ppr."

It would seem from this that they did not take much trouble to give the boy authentic information; I think it also shows there had probably been something handed down in the family that bore the crest of their ancestor, Roger Standish, a lineal descendant in the twelfth generation from Thurston de Standish.

In the Transcript of April 25, 1904, C. H. B. A., in a Note, called answer to Note No. 441, says, "The alleged royal descent of the Prescott family of Massachusetts has been sent to me for insertion in 'Americans of Royal Descent.'" Then he goes on to tell why he must decline to insert it, principally because Mr. Somerby was not reliable in his "claims" and John Prescott

was a blacksmith. We can only say that Mr. Somerby proved by the records what the family had known many years before, as proved by the following letter from F. W. Prescott, found among Mr. Somerby's papers now in the care of the New England Historic Genealogical Society of Boston.

[COPY]

CUSTOM HOUSE, Dec. 23, 1852.

DEAR SIR:—In accordance with your kind intimation that you would on your return to England, pay some attention to the history and pedigree of the Prescott family who came over to this country, or would at least consult your friend Mr. Somerby on the subject, I proceed to give you such information as I have in regard to him.

John Prescott is said to have been of Lancashire and to have married Mary Platts of Yorkshire. Their children were John, Mary, Martha, Sarah, Lydia, Jonathan and Jonas. I may not have put the names in the order of their birth, but from various circumstances I am led to the conclusion that the three or four first named were born before he came to this country, the three last named almost certainly after he came here. He is said to have been an owner of land in Barbadoes in 1638, and to have come here about 1640, and after stopping a short time in Charlestown to have settled in Watertown; in the record of which town I find the birth of his daughter Lidia in 1641. The property allotted to him in Watertown would tend to show that he was a man of substance and he was one of those who joined in the purchase of Nashaway, afterward Lancaster, and is noted by Millard as the first permanent settler of that town, and three at least of the other early settlers of that town were, or afterward became, sons-in-law of his. From the fact that he brought with him a complete suit of armor of the period and was in the habit of wearing it when he had difficulty with the Indians, it has been concluded that he was bred a soldier. Be that as it may, he seems to have followed the calling of mill builder and blacksmith in this country, and wrote himself Blacksmith in his will. This last fact I think proves little except that in a new country as this was then, every man turned his attention to such useful occupation

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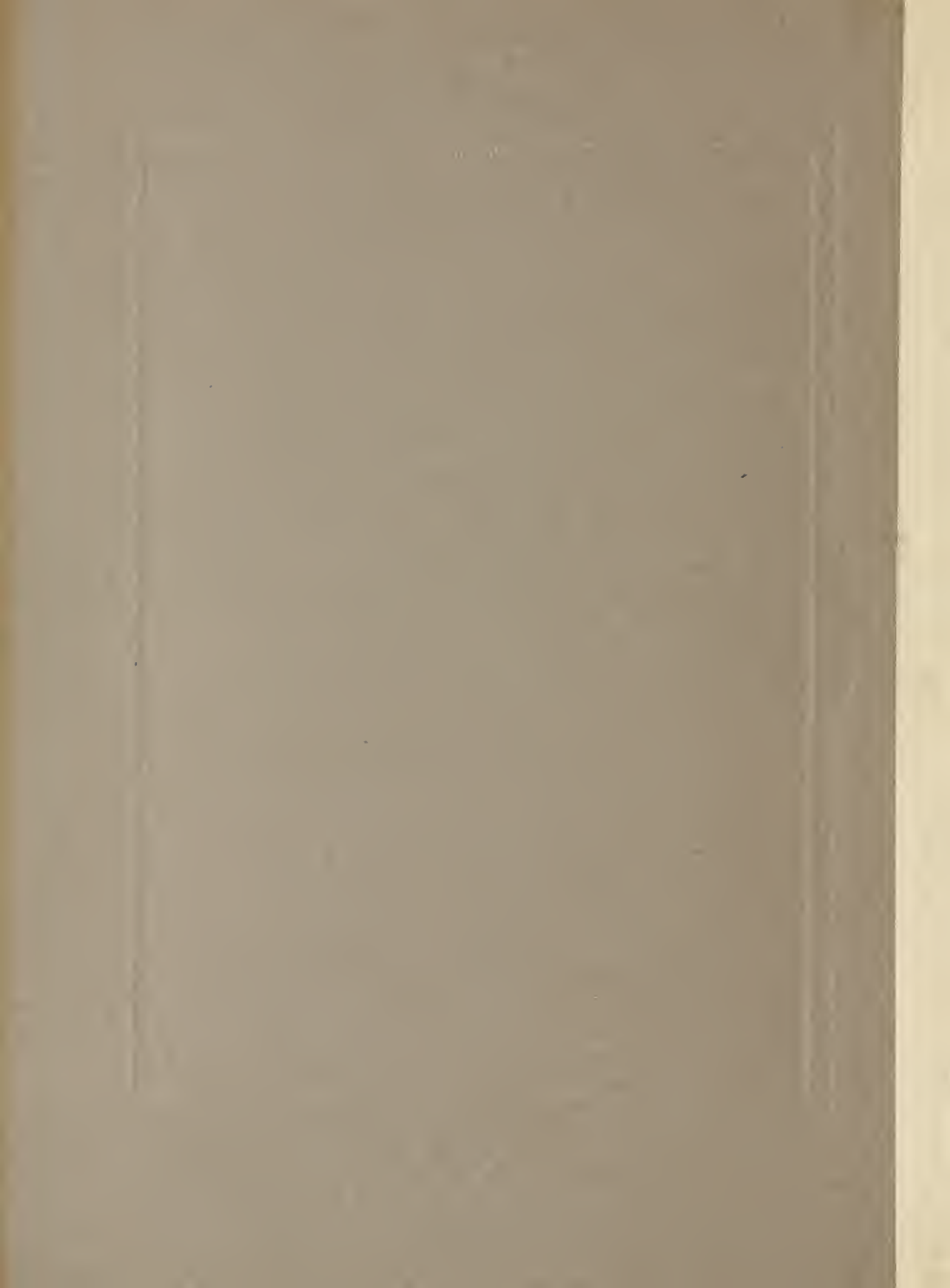
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John Prescott,

OF 1640,

D HIS DESCENDANTS





as he had ability for; and I am strengthened in the doubt whether he was not something better than a mere blacksmith by the tradition in the family and by the fact that I have in my possession a commission from Gov. Dudley to a third party in which his youngest son Jonas is spoken of as "Jonas Prescott, Gent." etc.

The arms of the family as used by my grandfather, Hon. Oliver Prescott of Groton, and by other members of the family are sable a chevron between three owls argent. The crest as used by my grandfather (I know not by what authority) is an owl as in the shield. That used by other branches of the family in the country is the arm and hand beacon, as borne by the Prescotts of Lancashire and London. The following, my brother Rev. Thomas Oliver Prescott of Glasgow, Scot., obtains at the Herald's College, London, and some friends with him seemed to think it had a bearing on the case :

William Prescott
of Coppul Co. Lancashire
descended from the ancient
family of Prescott of Prescott,
Co., Lancashire

Alexander Prescott
London, third son of
William

Sir John
Knight

Alexander
of Thirly
Co. Essex
second son
John eldest son and heir
apparent in 1634 aged 10 years.

Arms same as described above. I have now given you, my dear sir, all the facts in my possession that throw light on the subject. If I have attempted to explain the fact of John Prescott having been a blacksmith it is not for the sake of elevating him above his proper station, but only to prevent that fact from oper-

ating unduly as a bar to the discovery of his pedigree and station. If you can obtain any information for me you will confer a favor on

Yours very truly,

F. W. PRESCOTT.

Col. P. Bigelow Lawrence.

Also by his (F. W. Prescott) sketch of Hon. Benjamin Prescott, found among "Prince's Subscribers," in the New England Historical and Genealogical Register for July, 1852, before any work had been done in England. He says: "John Prescott of Lancashire married, in England, Mary Platts of Yorkshire, and in England several of their children were born. John Prescott went first to Barbadoes (it is said) and owned land there in 1638. About 1640 he came to New England, and after remaining some time in Charlestown and Watertown, settled in Lancaster, where he had good estate. He was one of the first settlers of Lancaster, which is said to have been named in compliment to him."

Then I have a letter before me from one of the family, now living in Brookline, Mass., born in 1823, in which she says: "My grandfather, Amos Farnsworth, Jr, who died in 1847, aged 93, asserted more than once before the date of Butler's History of Groton, or Mr. Somerby's researches that 'John Prescott was of Lancashire, while his wife was a Yorkshire girl.'" She also says: "My aunt, Miss Elizabeth Farnsworth, who died in 1884, aged 91, told me in the forties that Mary Platts came from Yorkshire, and had relatives named Platt or Platts, who settled in Rowley, Mass., and they are mentioned in Gage's 'History of Rowley.' Miss Elizabeth Farnsworth was noted for her wonderful memory, and had lived in the same house with her grandmother, Lydia Longley, born in Groton, June 26, 1716; married March 20, 1737, Amos Farnsworth, Sr.; she died in 1808, having always lived in the same town, where her grandfather, Jonas Prescott settled in 1672, and died Dec. 31, 1723; his widow died Oct. 28, 1735, aged eighty-two"

I think Rev. Mr. Holding did verify the statement found in the "Memorial" that Prescott was known as an ancient family in the town of Prescott, County of Lancashire. I have the following from Mr. Holding's findings:

1. "In an indenture dated March, 1336, we find the signature of John de Standish, John de Copull and Robert de Prestecote and others. Dated at Worthington."

2. "Another written at Standish, June 24, 1336, and witnessed by the same Robert de P."

3. "Another indenture relating to lands in Shevington, dated at Standish, Feb. 2, 1348, and witnessed by Robert de Prescote."

4. "Another long one, in which Thomas de Prestecote is named as holding lands of Robert de Nevill, 'in the said village of Shevynton.' Dated at Shevington, Nov. 30, 1350."

5. "Another an assignment of lands in Shevington to Ralph, son of John de Standish, in Shevington. Witnessed by Robert de Prestecote and others. Dated at Shevington, July 25, 1353."

In a letter from Stotfold, Baldock, dated Dec. 26, 1903, and signed John Holding, addressed to Mr. J. B. White of Kansas City, Mo., after speaking of the Whites of London, he says: "The Prescott entries are interesting, as they are all Roger Prescott's nephews, sons of William. They will help to complete fully the Prescott pedigree—in such a way as it has not been done before, and further show that the John who married Mary Platt alias Gawkroger was really the son of Ralph."

I am very glad that among Mr. Somerby's papers was not only found the marriage of John Prescott and Mary Gawkroger, on the Sowerby Register, Halifax Parish, but the date when he found it, "June 18, Saturday, 1859." This would seem to upset the idea of Mary Platt or Platts and the marriage at Wigan Church, Lancashire, but Mr. J. Henry Lee, a very reliable genealogist, as well as others, says that the name Gawkroger and Platts were interchangeable for ages, that the same man was one day called by one and the next day by the other; that it was the custom to register in the parish of the bride as well as that of the groom. Mr. Lee sends us from the Wakefield Manor Rolls, Court held April 19, 1534, "John Gawkroger present here in court in his proper person surrenders into the hands of the lord 7 acres of land with the buildings thereon called Platts now in the tenure of Richard Crowder with appurtenances in Sowerby."



We are told that Gawkroger means "left-handed" or left-handed Roger. It would seem that like the ancient Kendall family, ancestors of Francis Kendall of Woburn, 1640, who from 1400 to the present day are marked at intervals with extra fingers and toes, there was probably a branch of the Platts family who were left-handed or gawky. We do not wonder that when Mary and other members of the family came to New England they left the name of Gawk or left-handed Roger behind. In the New England Historical and Genealogical Register for 1885, in a list of those who were residents and owned ten acres or more of land on the island of Barbadoes in 1638, copied from an ancient paper found on the island, is found the name of John Prescott, thus proving that the family were correct in his wife coming from Yorkshire, and their being at Barbadoes in 1638. I have a genealogical extract of the will of Ralph Prescott of Shevington, dated in 1608, proved in 1609 in which he mentions his youngest son John (his children all being under age), and Rev. Mr. Holding of Stotfold, Baldock, Herts, England, searched faithfully to find any trace of him after the baptism of his son John, in Sowerby in the parish of Halifax, Yorkshire, England, April 1, 1635, and also followed up all other Johns of that age or time and proved what became of them.

Although we do not find any official document that says John Prescott the emigrant was the son of Ralph of Shevington, yet we believe it is reasonably clear and we shall not give it up without good and sufficient reason.

M. L. W.